

Eagle Cotton Mill
108 St. Michaels Avenue
Madison
Jefferson County
Indiana

HABS No. IND-94

HABS
IND.
39-MAD,
13-

PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. IND-94

EAGLE COTTON MILL

Location: 108 Saint Michaels Avenue, Madison, Jefferson County,
Indiana

USGS Madison East Quadrangle Map, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 16.641420.4288240

Present Owner
and Occupant: Meese Incorporated, a division of Central Rubber and
Supply Company

Present Use: Office, warehouse and factory for Meese Incorporated,
manufacturers of canvas shipping baskets

Statement of
Significance: The Eagle Cotton Mill was a leading producer of cotton
twine and yardage in Madison during the late nineteenth
century. This is the most extensive example of a nine-
teenth-century industrial complex surviving from the
days when Madison was a prospering waterfront trade cen-
ter on the Ohio River. The Cotton Mill's principal
proprietors, the Richard Johnson family, were locally
prominent citizens involved in several of Madison's
large-scale industrial and banking operations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1884. The Madison "Daily Courier" of June 18, 1884 announced the closure of a contract between the directors of the Eagle Cotton Mill Works and the architects Rankin and White. The work was "to begin immediate and be finished in 90 days. . ." By 1887, the complex of brick buildings occupied a full block.
2. Architects: Robert H. Rankin and James White. James White was born on April 17, 1842 at Blackwood, of the Closeburn Parish in Dumbrieshire, Scotland, into the family of James and Elizabeth White. James' family emigrated to the United States in the late months of 1850, landing in New Orleans before travelling upriver to arrive in Madison on March 22, 1851. White's uncle, Alexander White, had preceded the family of his brother by two years, arriving in Madison in 1849 and establishing his trade as an architect-builder by 1851. During James White's adolescent years in Madison, he apprenticed as a carpenter, under his uncle, probably between 1856 and 1862. White served in the War, 1862-65, returning to Madison in 1865. In March of 1868, he entered into a partnership

with a "Mr. Cochrane" under the name of Cochrane and White; he purchased Cochrane's interest in the partnership in 1870. In 1872 or 1873, White entered into a partnership with Robert H. Rankin, a former partner of Alexander White, under the name of Rankin and White. Like his uncle, White became a respected and admired professional in Madison, being elected to the city council in 1878 and 1904 and serving as Mayor of Madison between 1918 and 1922. The firm was together until the death of Rankin on August 10, 1887. Together, they "built cotton and woolen mills" in Madison. The Eagle Cotton Mill is believed to be the design of Rankin and White.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: The lots which the Eagle Cotton Mill occupies are within Scotts Garden. They include lots 1 and 8 in Block 6, lots 1-8 in Block 7, lot 1-4 in Block 8, and lot 1 in Block 9. The following is a summary of the complete chain of title of the land upon which the structures stand. Records are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Jefferson County Court-house, Madison.

1884 Deed, April 22, 1884, recorded April 22, 1884 in Book 48, page 328. Frank Gentry sold to the Eagle Cotton Mill Company Scotts Garden lots 1, 2, 3, 4, in Block 8 and lot 1 in Block 9, for consideration of \$2150.

Deed, May 5, 1884, recorded May 7, 1884 in Book 49, page 90. Peter Hoffman sold to the Eagle Cotton Mill Company Scotts Garden lot 1 in Block 6 for \$1300.

Deed, May 15, 1884 recorded May 15, 1884 in Book 49, page 103. The City of Madison sold to the Eagle Cotton Mill Company Scotts Garden lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, in Block 7 for \$1000.

Deed, August 16, 1884, recorded August 16, 1884 in Book 48, page 397. Nicholas Feltz sold to the Eagle Cotton Mill Company Scotts Garden lot 8 in Block 6 for \$525.

1940 Deed, March 26, 1940, recorded December 5, 1940 in Book 104, page 547. The Eagle Cotton Mill sold to Meese Incorporated all of Block 7 and Block 8 for \$25,000.

4. Original plan and construction: The Madison "Daily Courier" of June 18, 1884, in reporting the closure of the contract with Rankin and White, described the plan of the complex. Following is a list of the structures as described:

Main Building: 426 feet x 74 feet 6 inches, four stories tall; three stories of 12 feet each, last story 14 feet.

Picker House: set back from the main building by 25 feet; three stories in height, measuring 60 feet by 42 feet.

Boiler House: set back 25 feet from the main building; one story, measuring 48 feet x 51 feet.

Engine House: one story and basement measuring 33 feet 9 inches by 29 feet.

The Eagle Cotton Mill is located in the eastern part of the city, half a block from the Ohio River, lying south of First Street and bordered on the west by St. Michaels Avenue and on the east by Baltimore Street. The site upon which the plant complex is erected slopes southward down toward the river. Subsequent excavation has leveled the site, creating a high north bank at First Street.

The main structure (loft building) is four stories and approximately 75 feet (six bays) by 300 feet (twenty-five bays). The building's brick walls are 25 inches thick. Limestone sills and brick segmental arches frame the 8-foot high windows. Windows on the west (front) facade are twelve-over-twelve light double-hung sash; windows on the south facade are fifteen-over-fifteen light double-hung sash. The gable roof is low-pitched and the eaves project two to three feet, supported by projecting rafter ends on the north and south walls.

Each interior floor is a single open space except for the enclosed stairwells. The wooden post and beam structural system is exposed. It consists of twelve-inch square posts and approximately twelve by eighteen-inch beams. The two rows of posts, twelve-feet on center, divide the building transversely into three bays, each approximately twenty-five feet wide. On top of each post there is an iron plate on which the beam rests. At the base of each post is a similar plate set on a pin connection. The random-width flooring spans from beam to beam. The fourth-floor ceiling is the underside of the roof sheathing.

The short wings, one at the northwest corner and the other at the north facade's center, create an F-type floor plan. The wing extending from the loft's center is three stories and each story has direct access to the ground level due to the

slope of the landscape. The wing functions as a small shipping and receiving warehouse. The wing at the northwest corner of the building serves as the plant's central power station. A tapered brick smoke stack, approximately 100 feet high, is located next to the wing. In this wing, four steam boilers provide the power for a steam engine which in turn powers a huge flywheel located in the loft building. The flywheel, almost three stories high, was connected to a master drive shaft which, in turn connected with shafts on each floor to drive the machinery. The excess steam was sent through heating pipes around the perimeter of the building, keeping the building warm in all seasons.

Several small buildings, detached from the main structure line the north edge of the complex at First Street.

5. Alterations and additions: At the south side of the loft building, along St. Michaels Avenue, a one-story office wing was built circa 1925. The major alteration was the removal of the cotton mill machinery circa 1932.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In the early 1880s, a movement was begun by several prominent Madison businessmen to restore the city's industrial economy. During the previous twenty years, severe setbacks, including the transferral of important rail traffic to the north through Indianapolis, the loss of Southern markets during and after the Civil War, and the Depression of 1873 (which lasted in Madison until circa 1876), damaged the local economy. By 1883-1884, however, the situation was much improved. A woolen mill had been constructed, a new stone foundry was set in progress, a new rail line had been connected with Madison, and a passenger station had been built. The Eagle Cotton Mill was established during this new wave of commercial prosperity.

The Eagle Cotton Mill Company was organized in Madison circa 1880, and by late 1883, the effort to raise stock subscriptions was 95% complete, having been greatly heralded and appealed for in the local press.

By April of 1884, the stock subscription was complete, and a contract for \$115,000 was signed with the Eagle and Banner Mills of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania for the purchase, shipping and installation of the Pennsylvania firm's machinery in the completed Madison facility. In mid-April of the same year, the purchase of the

mill property was confirmed by the city council, subscribing \$10,000 toward the purchase of stock in the company. The Pittsburgh-based firm provided its master mechanic. Reuben Taylor, to dismantle, transport, and install the mill machinery, as well as maintain the works after production had begun. O. M. Harper, president of the Pittsburgh mills was made president of the mills at Madison. After the construction of the Eagle Cotton Mill was completed, Harper was sent to New York City to superintend the sales of the Madison merchandise at a 2-1/2% commission.

Around 1890, the company failed financially and went into debt. At this time, Richard Johnson, Sr., a businessman involved in a number of Madison's industrial enterprises "purchased the Eagle Cotton Mill" and by 1905 "his energy and tact built up a successful business."

Employing some four hundred operatives, most of German and Irish descent, the mill was the city's major industrial plant at the turn of the century. It produced low grade cotton yardages of unbleached muslin and tobacco canvas and twine. Around 1932 the mill machinery was sold. The factory served as a shoe factory between 1935-40, and finally became a plant for the manufacturing of canvas shipping baskets when it was acquired by Meese Incorporated in 1940.

Richard Johnson and his descendents have been major agents in the city's industrial and economic development since the 1850s. Following his arrival in Madison around 1850, Richard Johnson, Sr. held a major interest in four industries, - porkpacking, starch production, cotton, yarn and cordage mills, and banking.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

"Birdseye View of Madison, Indiana, 1887," black and white engraved map. Reproduced by the First National Bank of Madison.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Interviews:

Sydney Corfield, 410 Broadway, Madison, August 17, 1971.

Mrs. George M. Daily, 423 East Main Street, Madison
August 24, 1971.
Mrs. Louise Eckert Johnson, 744 West Main Street,
Madison, August 14, 1971.
Richard Johnson, President of First National Bank,
grandson of Richard Johnson, 101 West Main Street,
Madison, August 16, 1971.
David Meese 108 St. Michaels Avenue, Madison, August
15, 1971.
Norman Smith, Forman at Meese, Inc., 108 St. Michaels
Avenue, Madison, August 15, 1971.

Jefferson County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder,
Jefferson County Courthouse, Madison, Indiana.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Indianapolis Star," August 17, 1930.

Madison "Daily Courier," December 26, 1883; December 29,
1883; April 1, 1884; April 19, 1884; June 18, 1884.

Sutton Publishing Company's Madison Etc. Illustrated
Directory, 1887-88. Dubuque, Iowa: Hough and Hardie
Printers, 1887.

Prepared by Philip Dole
Team Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1971

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and Historic Madison. The structure was recorded in the summer of 1971 under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Melvin Rotsch (Texas A & M University), with student architects John G. Albers (University of Florida), Bruce E. Lynch (Washington University), H. T. Moriarity (University of Texas), John M. Szubski (Princeton University), and architectural historian Philip Dole (University of Oregon), at the HABS Field office in Madison, Indiana. The data was edited and expanded in the HABS office in November, 1978 by staff historian Jan E. Cigliano. Photographed by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in 1971.